

13 November 2013

No Sweat Fashions set to change lives with \$40k funding

New donations totalling \$40,000 are set to fund a not-for-profit social enterprise providing training and employment pathways for migrants and refugees in Canberra.

No Sweat Fashions (NSF) will receive gifts of \$15,000 from the Snow Foundation, \$15,000 from Aspen Medical and \$10,000 from the ACT Government's Office of Multicultural Affairs. The ACT Government is also providing premises for the initiative rent-free.

As NSF Founder and CEO Cindy Reese Mitchell observed, "We continually fall through the cracks of government funding priorities—migrant and refugee employment and social enterprise have been consistently overlooked to date, especially at the federal level because they are not seen as the most pressing areas of need. This gift has come just in time and will allow us to have a new intake of students beginning in January. The funds will be used to hire a part-time training manager to train participants in intermediate to advanced garment making, machining and embellishing skills."

ACT Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Joy Burch commended NSF for using the 'old' skills of sewing to help migrants and refugees make new lives in Canberra.

"The ACT Government is pleased to be co-investing with two of Canberra's most entrepreneurial and successful businesses for the benefit of some of Canberra's newest families," Ms Burch said.

Aspen Medical's Director Corporate Social Responsibility, Craig Fitzgerald said: "As an international Canberra-based company we are proud to be associated with No Sweat Fashions and their innovative social business model right here in the ACT. No Sweat deserves every opportunity to succeed as a Social Business and we hope by our involvement other Canberra businesses will also provide their support."

Speaking in support of the project, Chief Executive Officer of the Snow Foundation, Georgina Byron, said: "We have seen how daunting it can be for refugee women arriving in Australia, often facing huge language and employment barriers, but they all have prior learnings and experience. No Sweat Fashions will enable these refugees to become accustomed to working in Australia, get recognition for their skills, give them a social network and, of course, employment opportunities."

Participants initially join NSF as voluntary interns, but as their skills and confidence increase they are offered paid work in the production studio, at or above the relevant casual award wage.

"Our participants don't all go on to work in the garment industry, which is very small in Canberra. However, training with us builds marketable skills, improves English language ability, exposes them to the operation of an Australian work-place, builds self-confidence and helps them to establish networks across and beyond their own ethnic communities. These are all important elements of long-term employability that they just don't receive by sitting isolated in their homes," Ms Reese Mitchell said.

"It is well understood that early-stage social enterprise takes years to become fully self-sustaining. We rely on substantial gifts like these to give us time to develop our market for hand-made textiles and sample-making services.

“We are part of a vibrant community hub and high school community at the University of Canberra High School at Kaleen. Classes operate two days a week during school terms which helps the women in the group who are responsible for caring for young children. Our participants feel safe and welcome in the school and we intend to explore opportunities to have high-achieving students who are interested in aspects of our project participating as well.”

No Sweat Fashions is focused on providing meaningful and long-term social change for newly emerging migrant communities in Canberra, especially those that come from the most vulnerable refugee backgrounds including Sri Lanka, Burma, and Afghanistan. More information on No Sweat Fashions can be found at www.nosweatfashions.com

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